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OLC 71-0973
15 September 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with John Lehman, of the White House Staff,
Re Senator Stennis' Letter to the President

Today I talked to John Lehman, of the White House staff, who explained that while they had originally intended to have a LIG meeting today to discuss problems created by Senator Stennis' letter to the President calling for an end to Agency funding of operations in Laos, he said the White House was completely preoccupied with the draft bill problem. Lehman said he still hoped for a LIG meeting regarding the Stennis letter at the end of this week or the beginning of next. He added that at that time he hoped for suggestions from the Agency as to the various options open to us for continuing in Laos in the face of Stennis' objections to the present arrangements. I told Lehman that we would do what we could to come up with some recommendations, but it was my impression that Stennis not only was adamant regarding Agency funding, but felt strongly that we should get entirely out of the operation. Lehman said Ken Belieu, of the White House staff, had discussed the matter with Stennis recently and felt that Stennis' position was more flexible than I had indicated. I said I certainly hoped this was true, but my recent conversations with Stennis had lead me to believe he felt the Agency should get out of Laos-type operations as soon as feasible and indeed in his letter to the President Stennis expressed the view that such operations jeopardized the Agency's primary mission of intelligence collection and analyses. I therefore felt we couldn't afford to be optimistic on how much give there was in the position of Stennis, and indeed that of other influential members of Armed Services, Appropriations, and Foreign Relations Committees who were concerned with the problem. In any event, I said we'd certainly do our best to contribute to a solution in accordance with the Administration's wishes and acceptable to the Congress and we're already putting our heads together to see if we can come up with some suggested options in response to the White House request.

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[Redacted Signature Box]

JOHN M. MAURY
Legislative Counsel

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4. (Confidential - JMM) Met with Senator Frank Church regarding a letter he had written to Professor E. W. Pfeiffer of the University of Montana, stating that Senator Church had reliable information that Air America was responsible for defoliation operations in Cambodia. A copy of Senator Church's letter had been sent to the Director for comment by Professor Arthur H. Westing, Windham College in Vermont. I explained to the Senator we were much concerned over this allegation and the Director authorized me to deny it categorically. I added that while we were not prying into the identity of the Senator's source, we were curious as to whether this source's allegations were based on honest mistake or malice. If the former, I suggested the Senator might wish to straighten him out. Senator Church said he couldn't remember off hand where he learned this information but would check his files. He said he fully accepted our denial.

5. (Confidential - JMM) After consulting the Director I called Joe Wolf, in State, to say that we could not give him any answer to the question as to how we would respond if called upon by Symington to testify on intelligence exchange agreements. I said these agreements were largely informal, ad hoc, and sensitive. In any event I said State had insisted on getting us in the act by implying that the Senator should turn to us for information on intelligence exchanges, and we were in no position to commit ourselves in advance as to how we would respond to a request to appear. I said we would try to talk our way out of it and failing this, would try to talk to our Subcommittee Chairman but in any event we'd probably have to ad hoc it depending on the circumstances. Wolf said he understood our position, and thanked me for giving him information on the basis of which he hoped he could put the matter to rest in the Department.

6. (Secret - JMM) Attempted to see Senator Jackson (D., Wash.) to brief him on recent developments on Soviet strategic missiles but he was unavailable and I was told to try again tomorrow.

7. (Confidential - JMM) Talked to John Lehman, of the White House staff, regarding Senator Stennis' (D., Miss.) letter to the President concerning Agency involvement in Laos. See Memo for Record.

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